MARY S. COLEMAN, FIRST WOMAN MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT JUSTICE, MOURNED BY HIGH COURT

LANSING, MI, November 27, 2001 – Mary Stallings Coleman, the first woman to serve as a Justice and Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, passed away early today at her daughter's Ocala, Florida home. She was 87.

"This Court is in mourning, not only for a former Chief Justice, but for a great inspiration to Michigan women," said Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan. "Only six of the 103 justices in our state's history have been women, and five of them followed in the footsteps of Mary Coleman."

Coleman, the Court's 85th Justice, was followed by Dorothy Comstock Riley, Patricia J. Boyle, Elizabeth A. Weaver, Marilyn J. Kelly, and Corrigan. Riley, who also served as Chief Justice, and Boyle have retired from the Court.

During the presidential administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, Coleman was considered a likely choice to become the first woman Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Weaver, who served as Chief Justice of the Michigan high court from 1999-2000, said the former Chief Justice "opened the way for women to occupy the highest levels of the judiciary.

"When the history of Michigan's 20th century is written, Mary Coleman will be recognized as one of its most outstanding citizens," Weaver added. "In every aspect of her life, Justice Coleman was exceptional – a wise and courageous judge, a brilliant lawyer, a devoted wife and mother, a loving and loyal friend."

Weaver said Coleman's contributions to Michigan's judicial system included revising the state's probate and juvenile justice codes; Coleman drafted much of the state's first child protection legislation. "Mary served as a probate and juvenile judge in Calhoun County," Weaver noted. "She was very attuned to the needs of children and young people in the justice system."

Coleman was born in 1914 in Forney, Texas. Both her parents were attorneys; the family moved to Washington, D.C., while Coleman was a child. Her mother became chief of the U.S. Department of Justice section that enforced the beer and wine provisions of the Halstead Act.

Coleman received her undergraduate degree from the University of Maryland, and was twice voted "Miss University of Maryland." In 1939, after graduating with a law degree from George Washington University, Coleman married Creighton Coleman, also an attorney. The couple eventually settled with their two daughters in Marshall, Michigan, where Coleman and

her husband practiced law together. Creighton Coleman served in the Michigan Senate and was Senate Majority Leader from 1953-56. He later became a circuit judge in Calhoun County.

Mary Coleman practiced law before being elected to the Calhoun County Probate Court, where she served from 1961 to January 1973. She was elected to the Supreme Court in 1972 and served on the high Court from 1973 until her retirement in 1982. During retirement, Coleman traveled with her husband and served on the board of directors for Kmart Corporation, National Bank of Detroit, and Biggs/Gilmore Associates Advertising.

In 2000, Coleman was honored by the State Bar of Michigan with a Michigan Legal Milestone, entitled, "Pioneer, Advocate, Woman, Legend." She received 15 honorary degrees and was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

Coleman and her husband were active in Battle Creek civic life, especially in the local theater. A Battle Creek women's health center was named after her.

Coleman was preceded in death by her husband, who died in 1992. She is survived by her daughters, Dr. Leslie Hagan of Ocala, Florida and Dr. Carol Steenson of St. Paul, Minnesota, and by three grandchildren.

Funeral services will be handled by Shaw Funeral Home in Battle Creek. A service is being planned at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Battle Creek. Coleman will be buried in Marshall. The family asks that contributions be sent to Hospice of Marion County, 3231 S.W. 34th Avenue, Ocala, FL 34478.

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